Sketches in Finland.

The "Namns dag," or "Name's day," congratulations bear an important part in the hospitable customs of Finland. Almost every known name has a day appropriated to itself in the year's calendar, and one should be acquainted with the "Namns dag" of every member of his family if he would not be taken unawares. Once while staying at my summer residence at Muhos, some 30 English miles from Uleaborg, my wife and self were much surprised to see a cavalcade of carriages bearing down upon our lonely homestead. One after another turned into our courtyard, when we found that all our friends from town were there to congratulate my daughter, it being "Klara's dag," (Clara's day). Our larder was, happily, pretty well stocked, so the usual preliminaries of coffee, wine and cake, tea, and a dance, gave plenty of time for our servants to prepare supper. When April 6th, came round, that being "Wilhelm's dag," (William's day,) we were better prepared to receive the kindly-hearted friends who flocked in to wish me "health, wealth and happiness."

One of the curious matters that strike an Englishman is the custom of bringing "Helsningar," or "compliments," from their town or parish, thus: "Helsningar fran Uleaborg." On returning from church, even, they will bring "Helsningar fran Kyrkan."

Every day in the year seems to afford some subject of congratulation to the Fins, the most important of all being New Year's Day, when the governor of the place is first visited by all who know him, and afterwards every friend must be visited, in full dress. Hearty wishes are expressed for the happines of everyone, and the air resounds with "Ett godt nytt ar, min Far-bror," or "Ett godt nytt, min Bror," ("A happy New Year, my uncle," "A happy New Year, my brother.")

The "Jul-klapp," or "Christmas presents," made by the better sort of Fins are of a costly nature; not only do jewels and ornaments bear sway, for articles of use—even to wearing apparel—pass from hand to hand. These presents are made up in parcel's and on Christmas Eve at social gatherings they are sent flying into the room with the names of the recipients written upon them. Sometimes these parcels are a source of much amusement on account of their contents, as, when a young man who has not yet got enough down on his upper lip "to give," as *Punch* has it, "to (h)airy nothing a local habitation and a name," receives a razor as a present!

A very friendly custom—derived from the Swedes, no doubt—is that of the young men calling the elder ones "Far-bror," (uncle,) and each other "brothers." This is not done however, [illegible] of some to add you to his list of "uncles," he modestly makes his request, and on your acceding to it he shakes your hand and drinks to "Far-bror's skal," (uncle's health.) From that time in speaking of or andressing you he will invariably give you the "Far bror" prefix.

The Finnish peasant when in love does not declare his affection—save with his eyes, possibly, which are apt to speak volumes on such occasions. He entrusts his secret to some old dame, a mutual friend, who forthwith seeks out his inamorita and says to her all she can in favor of his suit, at the same time tendering some present from him. Should the girl decline this the disappointed match-maker has the melancholy task of breaking the sad news to the woe begone lover. If happier in her mission the loving pair are quickly betrothed, when a series of congratulations set in. The bride and bridegroom elect are waited upon by their friends upon an early day after their engagement is made known, and they are to be congratulated again upon the first as well as the last time of "asking" in church, for the banns must be published for rich and poor alike. The wedding invariably takes place in the same week in which they have been "asked" for the last time. The poorer class, whose house accommodation consists of one or, at most, two rooms, are married in church, but the better to-do have the ceremony performed at their own homes about 7 o'clock in the evening. A small square of carpet is laid upon the floor and cushions placed on this for the happy couple to kneel upon. The "marskalkar," (best men) stand at each corner of the square holding lighted tapers during the ceremony, which is concluded by an exhortation from the priest and congratulations and kisses all round. The party then eat, drink, smoke and dance far into the night, and for several following evenings. This, for a peasant would be a seriously expensive affair were it not that every guest leaves a money contribution according to his or her means. Frequently as much as 600 marks or £24, is subscribed on such occasions.

Among the richer class the wedding arrangements are really costly affairs, the dais for the kneeling pair being of the richest material, and the groomsmen bearing massive candelabra. The bride is always dressed in pure white, with a long flowing veil and wreath of natural flowers. Four bridesmaids, also in white, wear armlets of natural flowers, as do the groomsmen favors of the same on their coats. After the ceremony itself the supper is the great event of the evening, standing in place of our wedding breakfast. Served up at 12 o'clock, it is really a magnificent repast, the tables "groaning" under the weight of a most varied collection of eatables and drinks.

So sharp and biting is the winter's breath that soon after starting in the open air, the sledge, wraps, and yourselves are as white as though powdered with flour. This gives the appearance of grisly old age to every one. In traveling through the thick forests on a frosty, moonlight night, many weird and spectral effects are seen; marvellous objects formed by winters time on trees, bushes and rocks.

No description can convey the powerful impression these imaginary scenes have upon the mind, nor the weight the sublime yet awful silence has upon one's spirits. The dreary sound of the crunching snow or the horse's bells alone disturbs the solitude, save when the bark of some tree is rent by the frost and cracks with a dull and leaden sound.

No fear need now be entertained of an attack by wolves or other ravenous beasts, as such are fast becoming extinct in Finland; sheep, and even dogs, are sometimes missing through their raids, and it will at times happen that in the anguish of famine the wolves attack horses.

A species of sledge, small and very light, called "Kalke," enables a pedestrian to get over the ground very quickly. A rope is attached to the front part, by aid of which it is pulled up hill. Once at the top, the owner gets into the "Kalke," pulls against the rope, and goes flying down the declivity, steering with his feet, at express speed. This besides being the bicycle, is also the perambulator and the clothes basket of the country.

Snow shoes are a favorite aid to locomotion, and are very simply constructed by the peasants themselves from a pliable strip of birch—3in or 4in in width and from 5ft to 6ft long—slightly turned up in front. In the centre of each "shoe" is a strap, similar to that upon a clog, sometimes made of leather, but more frequently of twisted willows, into which the feet are slipped. A short staff, to the end of which is affixed a wheel (to prevent the stick sinking to deep into the snow), assists the traveller to give himself the first impetus, and afterwards to steer in whatever direction he may require. It is wonderful how swiftly by the aid of these shoes the natives fly down hills, and even on a level road they go faster than the swiftest horse. The writer tried to learn the art of snow-shoe travelling, but came to immediate grief.—*Otago Witness.*

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